

Love at first sight



Photo by Airman 1st Class Vanessa LaBoy

Tech. Sgt. Joesph Vest holds 8-day-old Joseph Jr. for the first time.



Photo by Staff Sgt. Alan Port

Senior Airman Christopher Osterholm meets two month old Ellycka-Justine.



Photo by Staff Sgt. Alan Port

Capt. Alex Jernigan carries his two-month-old son Brandon.

by Airman 1st Class Vanessa LaBoy
49th Fighter Wing Public Affairs

Three Team Holloman members held their new-born babies for the first time when they returned from supporting Operation Iraqi Freedom.

After two and a half months of pictures via e-mail, Capt. Alex Jernigan, Tech. Sgt. Joseph Vest and Senior Airman Christopher Osterholm, were introduced to their newborns.

Jernigan stepped out of an F-117A Nighthawk and scanned the welcoming crowd of more than 200 people for his wife Cheryl, his four-year-old son Devin, and two-month-old, Brandon.

“It was a very exciting moment,” Jernigan said. “I’ve been thinking about what he was going to look like, the little expressions he would make on his face. While deployed, I had new pictures of him and my family waiting for me when I went into work; that was an inspiration in itself.”

Already the father of three, Vest stepped off the bus and held his fourth child, eight-day-old Joseph Jr.

“After he was born, my wife used a moral call to tell me all about Joe Junior,” Vest said, “but it wouldn’t prepare me for the first time I held him. I was very scared. He was so small and looked fragile. It was a very special moment.”

Osterholm, the newest dad out of the three, was introduced to his daughter, two-and-a-half-month-old Ellycka-Justine.

“I was overjoyed when I received the email from my mother-in-law,” Osterholm said. “Words can’t describe the way I felt when I held her for the first time; I was in awe. I couldn’t believe how much she looked like me.”

These wives spent a special moment without their spouse, but they weren’t alone.

“When I found out Joe wouldn’t be here for the birth, I was heartbroken,” Kelly Vest said. “Everyone wants to share this moment with the one they love, but being a military wife means making sacrifices. Keeping busy got me through it.”

Although separated from the one they love, the wives were surrounded by their Air Force Family.

“When I knew that my husband wasn’t going to be there for our daughter’s birth, I was very emotional,” Alicia Osterholm said. “I didn’t know how I was going to do it without him, but at the same time, I was very proud of him for doing what he was called to do. The main thing that got me through this tough time, was all the help I received from my key spouse, Lynda Forcum, Lt. Col. Mark Rumph and his wife, all of the first sergeants, and of course my mom.”

While deployed all three airmen were properly trained and focused on accomplishing the mission their families were left to fill an unexpected hole in their lives.

“I was not happy that I had to leave her at a time like this, but I knew I had a job to do and sometimes we have to make sacrifices,” Vest said. “Although I couldn’t share that special moment with my family I knew they were in good hands, with the help of our Air Force family.”



Photo by Ellis Neal

A tiny patriot cheers as five F-117A's taxi past a welcoming crowd of over 200 people.



Photo by Staff Sgt. Alan Port

Staff Sgt. Kurtis Fisher is welcomed home with hugs from his children, Destin and Evelyn.



Photo by Airman 1st Class Vanessa LaBoy

Lt. Col. David Toomey waves to the crowd as he steps out of an F-117A Nighthawk.



Photo by Staff Sgt. Alan Port

Capt. Brian Anderson is greeted by his son Michael as he exits an F-117A Nighthawk.



Photo by Staff Sgt. Alan Port

A crowd of more than 200 Team Holloman airmen and Alamogordo community members welcomed home five F-117A Nighthawks April 16, after supporting Operation Iraqi Freedom. More than 300 troops and the remaining F117's also returned this week.

Airmen reconnect with loved ones

by Lorna Schuster
Sunburst Staff Writer

About 300 Holloman troops deployed in support of Operation Enduring Freedom have returned over the past week. To make reconnecting with loved ones a smooth process, the Family Support Center has a few important tips.

“First of all, take the reunion process slowly,” said Master Sgt. Walter Clark, 49th Fighter Wing Readiness NCO. “Everyone involved needs time to readjust to being back together. Being patient, understanding and flexible will go a long way.”

According to Clark, reunited families sometimes have difficulties in recognizing how each person has grown or how roles and interests may have changed. Failure to recognize these changes can bring on other stress factors in a relationship such as miscommunication, he said.

“It’s important to appreciate that each family member got through this time apart the best they could,” Clark said. “We need to remember to acknowledge their contribution to the mission.”

Clark also advises that reunions with ex-

tended family and friends be put off until the returning airman has had the chance to spend time with the immediate family. Having friends and other family over right away can cause stress for the immediate family members who are already competing for time with the returning member.

Single airmen returning to base will also go through a reunion process and should prepare themselves.

“Friendships will need to be re-established,” Clark said. “Peer groups may have changed due to friends moving to new bases or leaving the service. Also, the returning member may have gotten the job done a little different at the deployed location versus here at the home station.”

The Family Support Center provides short-term family counseling, pamphlets on reuniting, and the Return and Reunion program on videotape or compact disc. The official website of the Air Force, www.afcrossroads.com, also addresses separations and reunions.

“Most importantly,” said Clark, “people need to recognize the affect of a deployment separation for what it is – a temporary period of adjustment.”